



# Shalom12|25

The Journal of the Reading Jewish Community published by the *Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks*

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  - Friendship Circle
  - Community Shabbat
  - Reading Jewish Film Series
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  - Camp Scholarships
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  - Lakin Holocaust Library
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**PLANNING AHEAD**

## Taking care of ourselves, our families and our community

**By Russell Farbiarz**  
*Antanavage Farbiarz PLLC*

As we move through different stages of life, our priorities shift. Many of us are thinking about our families, our homes, our health, and the legacy we want to leave. Estate planning is one of the most meaningful ways to care for the people and the community we love. Many delay estate planning for a number of reasons, including the belief that estate planning is only for the wealthy. Estate planning is for everyone! It is about protecting your wishes, reducing stress for loved ones, and making sure your values carry forward.

In partnership with the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks, Antanavage Farbiarz PLLC, will be offering a free community presentation on this topic on Dec. 7 with refreshments at 9:30 a.m, and program starting at 10. During the program we will discuss what you need to know and answer your questions in a friendly and practical way. Bagels, coffee and refreshments will be served.

**What Is Your Estate?**

Your estate includes everything you own: your home, bank accounts, retirement accounts, life insurance, and personal belongings. But it also includes something less tangible: your voice. Your estate plan ensures that your preferences are respected and that the people you trust are the ones making decisions if you cannot.

Estate planning means putting legal documents in place so your wishes are honored—without unnecessary court involvement or family conflict.

**Key Documents in a Basic Estate Plan**

1. Will

A will guides who receives your assets and names the person responsible for carrying out your wishes.

2. Power of Attorney

This allows a trusted person to handle financial matters if you become unable to manage them yourself.

3. Healthcare Power of Attorney / Living Will

This names someone you trust to speak with your doctors and make healthcare decisions if needed.

**Considering a Trust**

For some families, a trust can help avoid the probate process, simplify the transfer of assets, and provide protection in situations such as blended families, remarriage, business ownership, or long-term care planning. Trusts can also help ensure that money is used responsibly by future generations.

**Planning for Long-Term Care**

One of the largest financial risks older adults face is nursing home care, which can cost over \$10,000 per month in Berks County. With proper planning, many people are able to preserve their home and still qualify for Medicaid when necessary. Advanced planning offers more options.

**Adding Charitable Giving to Your Plan**

Estate planning is not only about passing down what you own — it's also about expressing your values.

For many in our community, supporting

local organizations, synagogues and charities is an important part of life. Including charitable gifts in your estate plan allows you to continue that support for years to come. These gifts can be modest or significant — every contribution carries meaning.

There are several ways to include charitable giving in your plan:

- Naming a charity as a beneficiary of an IRA or life insurance policy
- Leaving a specific dollar amount or percentage in your will or trust
- Establishing a donor-advised fund for your children or grandchildren to manage
- Making Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) directly from your IRA starting at age 70½

Even small gifts can create lasting impact and can be a way of passing down values of generosity, community, and caring.

**Looking Ahead to 2025: Tax Planning Opportunities**

Several tax rules will shift in 2025, and some may create opportunities for charitable giving and retirement planning. For example, individuals over age 65 may be eligible for a new Senior Tax Deduction. In addition, there will be expanded ways to support younger generations through savings accounts and continued planning strategies around retirement accounts.

Together, we will explore how planning ahead can provide security, clarity, and peace of mind — not only for your family, but also for the community you care about.

*Continued on Page 3*

## Remembering Kristallnacht



Local descendants of Holocaust survivors gather at Reading's annual Kristallnacht anniversary observance, held this year at Trinty Lutheran Church, to light candles in memory of the 6 million killed under the Nazi German regime.



# Chanukah sheds light on community spirit

**By Richard Bradbury**  
*Director of Development*  
*Oh Chanukah, Oh Chanukah, the sweet celebration/Around the feast we gather in complete jubilation!*



I would be hard-pressed if you asked me the title of the last movie I saw, but somehow a song I sang nightly, for two months, has earned a special corner in my memory.

At 21, I had a life-changing theatre experience when Genesis Theatre (Reading) produced the play “The Diary of Anne Frank.” I was thrilled about the story, the play and the opportunity to audition. If you read the November *Shalom*, you may remember my epiphany upon viewing the TV miniseries “Holocaust,” which propelled my interest to learn and understand more about this devastating period of history.

I auditioned for the play and was cast in the role of Peter Van Daan, who along with his mother and father, went into hiding in the rooms above Otto Frank’s spice business in Amsterdam to escape Nazi persecution, expulsion and the fate of concentration camps.

The rehearsal process and performances were filled with emotion and many learning opportunities: reading the diary, investigating the history of the families — before and after the Annex, watching movies (the 1959 film version of the play and “Judgment at Nuremberg”), learning Jewish customs and prayers, learning the Netherlands national anthem (in Dutch!), and much about World War II. One particular rehearsal holds a place in my memory: our director challenged the cast to remain still for the entire rehearsal — minimal movement — no talking — footsteps on wooden floors could be heard below! Three hours felt like an eternity; I cannot imagine the rigor and anxiety of living this for more than two years.

The year I turned 21, my mother, Janice, began a new relationship with David Sherman, who would become my stepfather three years later. David grew up in Pennside and now lived in a beautiful home at 25th and Prospect. David and his family were Jewish (emphasis on the -ISH). Oddly enough, David would be my second Jewish stepfather.

Was David trying to impress my mom or was he sincerely interested in our production of “Anne Frank” because he wanted to be involved? David was what we in the Penn State Theatre Department called a “buzzhead”. Obsessed with sound, recording, wires, mikes, music. In the play, Anne has many voiceovers, and David was so excited to record these monologues and add underscoring to enhance the tone of the scene. For a full day we hunkered down in the attic/recording studio in the house in Pennside: me, David, our director and the young girl playing Anne. My mom kept the breakfast and lunch coming. I remember hot chocolate — it was a cold, gray Saturday in fall. It became a “best day,” a term my husband and I use to describe perfect days. Thanks, David and Mom, for creating a great memory.

At the conclusion of Act One, the families joyously celebrate Chanukah. There is little



*Above, from left, Kristin V.B., Richard Bradbury, Richard’s mom (Janice Sherman), Leonard Sherman (David’s father) and Ian (David’s son)*

*At right, Genesis Theatre’s production of “The Diary of Anne Frank” (1981) with Kristin V.B. as Anne and Richard Bradbury as Peter Van Daan.*

food and homemade presents (from Anne), but there is family, a menorah and candles, hope, love and singing! *“Happiest of seasons now is here/Many are the reasons for good cheer!”*

I’d like to believe that David’s time working on “Anne Frank” rekindled a light in him. That December, David (and my mom) invited me and Kristin (our Anne) to celebrate the first night of Chanukah at the house in Pennside. I had the feeling Chanukah had not been celebrated in this house for some time. If so, I am so happy and proud that our production had a small part in lighting that first candle!

David and my mom made it an annual tradition to invite friends, primarily Christians, to Chanukah so they too would experience the traditions, the blessings, the lighting of the candles, the exchange of gifts, the joy of being together — and the food! There was always brisket (the red version) from Leonard “Pop” Sherman’s recipe, David’s scrumptious latkes and my mom’s kugel and cookies. We hesitated calling them Christmas cookies — until “Pop” Sherman tasted my mom’s sand tarts. After that he said, “Go ahead — put up your tree! But not in the front window!” LOL!

David, “Pop” and my mom unknowingly created an interfaith experience. Our guests, while experiencing the light and joy of Chanukah, were exposed to another culture, demystifying the “strange” or alien, deepening our respect for differences and in the process, opening hearts and minds.

Much of what I feel about my own “Jew-ish journey” and memories were made manifest when I joined the Jewish Federation. I get to experience fellowship at Friendship Circle and volunteering at food pantries, deepen my appreciation for the culture and traditions at Noontime Knowledge and by attending Kristallnacht and Yom Hashoah, continue my learning through guest lecturers and new



authors, expand my world view through our Jewish Film Festival and theatre, and take interfaith journeys where I can Shine a Light on Antisemitism with friends from different cultures and religions.

Our Federation gives me so many reasons and opportunities to connect with “my Jew-ish experience” and places me in a circle of people I respect and whose company I enjoy. It is my hope you feel your Federation provides you with a strong sense of connectivity to your Jewish roots and your Jewish community.

During this season of light and miracles, please consider making an end-of-year gift to your Jewish Federation. Let your Federation help you do something “miraculous” for others as we spread our tradition of Tikkun Olam across our county — across cultures and around the world.

*Together we’ll weather, whatever tomorrow may bring/So hear us rejoicing and merrily voicing the Chanukah song that we sing/ SO HEAR US REJOICING AND MERRILY VOICING THE CHANUKAH SONG THAT WE SING!*

Wishing you and yours all the joys — and bittersweet memories — that come with the festival of light! Happy Chanukah!

# Development

Annual Campaign

Women’s Philanthropy

Maimonides Society

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### so we can help tomorrow!

ANNUAL COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN 2025 DONATE TODAY

[ReadingJewishCommunity.org](http://ReadingJewishCommunity.org)



Jewish Federation  
OF READING/BERKS



**Today  
Tomorrow  
Always**



# Happy Chanukah! And what’s been going on at your Federation

**By Cindy Gerber Tomlinson**  
*Chief Executive Officer*

As Chanukah draws near, we are reminded of the great miracles that happen all around us every day. We appreciate the little things in life and see the beauty in the people with whom we share our lives. This month, I would like to shine a light on the exciting things that have been happening at your Federation.

A very impactful addition to our capability at the Federation has been the acquisition of recording equipment and technology to provide live streaming of our events. This resource has allowed us to share the incredible speakers and programs that we provide to our community beyond the people who are able to attend in person. We have members of our Jewish community who now live at a geographic distance from Reading/Berks and want to remain involved. We have members of our community who have commitments to work and family at the times that we are having the events but who would like to experience these educational and thought-provoking opportunities when they have the time to focus on them — on demand. We have members of our community who plan to attend in person, but when the event happens, perhaps they are unable to for



one reason or another. The ability to live stream these events in real time, and to have the recording available after the fact, enables so many more people to benefit from these wonderful programs, enjoy a shared experience and feel connected to our Jewish community. We are forever grateful to Carol and Bernie Gerber for sponsoring this capability and to Rick Tomlinson for providing his technical expertise to acquire the equipment and to make it work seamlessly. Vicki Haller Graff and Amanda Wertz have come up to speed quickly to learn how to operate the technology and connect us all with our speakers. This has been a great accomplishment made possible through strong teamwork!

Another achievement has been the unification of all four of our Jewish organizations, joining for shared successes across our entire Jewish community. We wish our heartfelt Mazel Tov to Keshet Zion for its first Bingo Day, a gathering that brought about lots of fun and funds! RCOS enjoyed another banner year Food Festival filled with lots of delicious Jewish food and culture and enjoyed by the Berks County community at large, and Chabad celebrated 25 years of hard work in Jewish recovery with “The Light Ahead,” a shared experience incorporating leadership from across the area’s mental health, educational and business trailblazers.

The Federation had a stellar Leo Camp Leadership Dinner and Public

Lecture with former U.S. Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer sharing his thoughts and insights about Israel and the Middle East with over 135 people, the powerful screening of the movie “October 8” at the GoggleWorks with 40 in attendance, thought-provoking book discussions through the ongoing Literatour program with the Exeter Library, and an up close and personal conversation with Dani Wassner, managing director of Government Relations for JFNA in our own offices in Wyomissing to a crowd of 40, to name a few. The Federation looks forward to continuing to support all of our synagogues and the critical work that they do for our Jewish community and beyond.

We are so proud of our JFS (Jewish Family Service) for the imperative work they do helping clients with food insecurity, housing and combatting loneliness, and our JCRC (Jewish Community Relations Council) for its tremendous work reaching out and making meaningful connections with leadership throughout the educational, government, business and nonprofit Berks County community. Margo Levin and Debbie Goldberg have been doing fantastic work representing our Jewish community with GRUC (Greater Reading Unity Coalition), proactively combatting antisemitism by creating significant relationships with Centro Hispano, The Reading Branch of the NAACP,

Bring The Change, Islamic Center of Reading, Islamic Society of Berks County, LGBT Center of Greater Reading, and Alvernia University’s Holleran Center for Community and Global Engagement. Their most recent gathering featured guest speaker Richard Harwood of the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation in which 80 people listened as Rich passionately explained how communities across the country need to get on a “new civic path. The audience then worked together to determine how to make Reading thrive as “a civic engine” that is “turning outward and moving forward.”

The upcoming “Shine A Light” event on Tuesday, Dec. 16, at 5:15 p.m. in Reading will feature the City Menorah Lighting followed by a reception for our community leaders and elected officials. Featured speaker Rabba Rori Picker Neiss, Senior Vice President and Rabbi in Residence at Jewish Council for Public Affairs, and local civic leaders, GRUC and the Jewish Community will come together to Shine a Light on antisemitism.

We are very excited about all of these great happenings at the Federation. We work hard every day to bring our community together and provide meaningful experiences. Please come and join us at many more events and programs, and always feel free to share your ideas and suggestions for what else you would like to see from YOUR Federation!



## Before the Year Ends, Protect What Matters.

A quick review of your estate plan can save your family time, taxes, and stress later. From wills and trusts to beneficiary updates and gifting strategies, we help you close the year with clarity and confidence.

**Schedule your year-end estate review today!**



(610) 562-2000 | [www.antanavagfarbiarz.com](http://www.antanavagfarbiarz.com)

JOIN US FOR A FREE SEMINAR AT THE JEWISH FEDERATION OF READING/BERKS ON DEC. 7 AT 10 AM!

999 Berkshire Boulevard • Suite 110, Wyomissing, PA 19610  
64 N. Fourth Street, Hamburg, PA 19526

# PLANNING

**Continued from Page 1**

Every person’s financial and family situation is unique. The best planning happens when legal, financial, and charitable goals are considered together.

**You Don’t Need to Do This Alone**

Estate planning is not a one-time project. It can be reviewed and updated as life and family evolve. The most important step is simply beginning the conversation.

We invite you to join us:  
Estate Planning Basics & 2025

Planning Opportunities

Saturday, Dec. 7, at 9:30 a.m. for refreshments; program beginning at 10 at the Jewish Federation Office (1100 Berkshire Blvd, Wyomissing, PA 19610)

Hosted by Antanavage Farbiarz PLLC and the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

Together, we will explore how planning ahead can provide security, clarity, and peace of mind — not only for your family, but also for the community you care about.


## Shalom

A newspaper serving the Jewish community of Berks County, Pennsylvania, and published monthly, September through June, under the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks. Funded by the Annual Jewish Community Campaign.

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*The opinions expressed in Shalom are of the writers and not the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks*



### Jewish Federation

of Reading/Berks



# Noontime Knowledge in December

By Vicki Haller Graff  
Program Director

Join us for Noontime Knowledge in December at the JCC. This month, the focus is on Jewish modern art and Jewish theater — lots of culture coming your way. Mark your calendar now and join us..

**Wednesday, Dec. 10, noon - Sara Howells**

In November, Sara Howells of the Triptych Federation gave a dynamic and provocative talk about art during the Cold War and the CIA's influence on artists, highlighting the life and work of Jackson Pollock. If you missed it, you can watch it on our YouTube channel!

In December, Sara will return to add more to the story, highlighting women artists of the time, many of them Jewish. Join us at the JCC on Wednesday, Dec. 10, at noon, for Sara's lecture, "Unappreciated in their Time: Jewish Female Modern Artists."

In 1946, an art critic saw a new technique applied to canvas — drip painting. Instead of praising the artist, Janet Sobel, for her extraordinary work, he taught it to Jackson Pollock. Many famous modern art techniques were pioneered by Jewish women but credit given to their male contemporaries. This talk will celebrate these women who changed, and continue to change, the narrative of post-war modern art.

Sara Howells is an art historian who has taught at Penn State and West Chester. As co-founder of the Triptych Federation, she brings college quality lectures to the



Sara Howells, shown at the Nov. 12 Noontime Knowledge, is returning in December.

community. Triptych is a global arts community dedicated to focusing on spotlighting artists of ALL kinds, as well as providing exhibition and networking opportunities.

**Tuesday, Dec. 16, noon - "Drama in Diaspora: Key Texts and Times in Jewish Theatre"**

The final Noontime Knowledge of the year is one I am very excited to attend! It's about Jewish theater, and if you know me you know that theater and Judaism are two things I care about very deeply. I hope to see you on Tuesday, Dec. 16, at noon at the JCC for "Drama in Diaspora."

Wherever there's been a stage, there's likely been a Jewish play performed on it. Join us for a lively

presentation that is part talk and part performance, in which Jewish plays serve as a springboard for exploring the rich history and evolution of Jews in Diaspora. More than a history lesson, it's an engaging journey through the cultural tapestry that has shaped who Jews are today.

Our presenter is Jesse Bernstein, the producing artistic director of Theatre Ariel, the premiere Jewish theater in Philadelphia. Jesse has been working in theatre, film and TV in one role or another for 35 years. He has written, performed, directed, taught and produced around the country. Locally, he's worked at the Arden Theatre Company, Walnut Street Theatre, Lantern Theatre Company, Philadelphia Young Playwrights and more. He is the Producing Artistic Director of Theatre Ariel, Philadelphia's premiere Jewish theatre company, and is the President of the Board for the Alliance for Jewish Theatre.

Theatre Ariel is Philadelphia's only professional theatre company dedicated to telling stories about the Jewish experience. For over three decades, they have been presenting plays and special events that speak to Jewish history, culture and thought. Their plays have touched on every aspect of the diverse fabric of Jewish life.

Noontime Knowledge programs are free and open to the public — bring a friend! Planning to attend? Please let us know by emailing [info@jfreeding.org](mailto:info@jfreeding.org) or calling 610-921-0624. Would you like to present or recommend a presenter? Please contact Vicki Graff, Program Director, at [vickig@jfreeding.org](mailto:vickig@jfreeding.org).

## More learning at Noontime Knowledge



At left, artist Mike Miller informs the Noontime Knowledge group about the details of murals in West Reading. David Richie of Berks Opera, right, speaks about the history of "The Magic Flute."



### NOONTIME KNOWLEDGE

at the JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Ste. 125, Wyomissing

***Unappreciated in their Time:  
Jewish Female Modern Artists***  
with Sara Howells, Triptych Foundation  
**Wednesday, December 10, 2025, at noon**



Janet Sobel, "Untitled", 1946.

In 1946, an art critic saw a new technique applied to canvas- drip painting. Instead of praising the artist, Janet Sobel, for her extraordinary work, he taught it to Jackson Pollock. Many famous Modern art techniques were pioneered by Jewish women but credit given to their male contemporaries. This talk will celebrate these women who changed, and continue to change, the narrative of post-war Modern art.

To RSVP call the JCC at 610-921-0624  
or email [info@jfreeding.org](mailto:info@jfreeding.org)

Noontime Knowledge is a free program, held twice monthly, provided by the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks to educate our community on a variety of topics.



### NOONTIME KNOWLEDGE

at the JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Ste. 125, Wyomissing

***Drama and Diaspora:  
Key Texts and Times in Jewish Theatre***  
with Jesse Bernstein, Theatre Ariel  
**Tuesday, December 16, 2025, at noon**



Wherever there's been a stage, there's likely been a Jewish play performed on it. Join us for a lively presentation that is part talk and part performance, in which Jewish plays serve as a springboard for exploring the rich history and evolution of Jews in Diaspora. More than a history lesson, it's an engaging journey through the cultural tapestry that has shaped who Jews are today.

To RSVP call the JCC at 610-921-0624  
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Noontime Knowledge is a free program, held twice monthly, provided by the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks to educate our community on a variety of topics.









The Menorah Lighting Celebration in Reading's Penn Square is a festive, meaningful show of community and interfaith harmony year after year. This year's program takes place Dec. 16..

# Join our Chanukah celebration

**By Margo Levin**  
*JCRC Coordinator*  
The City of Reading, in collaboration with the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks, invites the community to join the 2025 Menorah Lighting Celebration on Dec. 16 at 5:15 p.m.at Fifth and Penn Street. This annual gathering brings

neighbors together to mark the beginning of Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, with warmth, unity, and tradition. As the menorah's candles are kindled — symbolizing hope, resilience, and the enduring power of light — all are encouraged to share in the joy and brightness of the season.

December ☆ Kislev-Tevet	
 Shabbat Candle Lightings	 Torah Portions
December 5 4:20 pm	December 6/16 Kislev Vayishlach (Genesis 32:4-36:4)
December 12 4:20 p.m.	December 13/23 Kislev Vayeishev (Genesis 37:1-40:23)
December 19 Chanukah 4:26 p.m.	December 20/30 Kislev Mikeitz (Genesis 41:1-44:17) Chanukah- Rosh Chodesh
December 26 4:24 p.m.	December 27/7 Tevet Vayigash (Genesis 44:18-47:27)

# JEWISH COMMUNITY NIGHT

# 76ERS GAME

SCAN CODE BELOW  
TO RSVP

# BUS TRIP TO PHILLY

# DECEMBER 2, 2025



\$80 JCC MEMBER OR \$90 NON-MEMBER  
\$50 YOUTH UNDER AGE 18



# Chanukah Storytime Tour

**By Vicki Haller Graff**  
*Program Director*  
PJ Library, a program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, delivers free Jewish books to children each month from newborns to age 12. Some stories act as a mirror to reflect families' own experiences and affirm identity and belonging, while others are windows, offering glimpses into different customs, traditions, and cultures to spark curiosity and learning. In the past year, we have added over 20 new children to our list, and we hope to continue to add more. Books can be a great way to bring Jewish life and learning into the home. If your children or grandchildren aren't signed up, what are you waiting for?! This December, I'll be touring some Berks County library story times to meet Jewish families in the community and to introduce Jewish life to non-Jewish families in a fun and celebratory way. I would love to see you and your favorite child (or children) at one (or more) of the story times:

- Wednesday, Dec. 3, 11 a.m. at

the Hamburg Public Library

- Monday, Dec. 8, 10:15 a.m. at Boone Library
- Friday, Dec. 12, 10:30 a.m. at Exeter Community Library
- Monday, Dec. 15, 10:30 a.m. at Kutztown Community Library
- Wednesday, Dec. 17, 10:30 a.m. at Wernersville Library
- Friday, Dec.19, 10 a.m at Schuylkill Valley Public Library


These story times will feature PJ Library approved Chanukah books, songs, and crafts. I'm very excited to see current PJ families (who are able to come during the day), make new connections, and introduce a light-filled, family-oriented holiday to new friends. If your neighborhood library is not listed, please let your children's librarian know you'd like to see some PJ Library programming for future holidays. Tu B'Shvat is Monday, Feb. 2, and would be a great starting point for more story times! The birthday of the trees is a wonderful celebration for children and young families.




## PJ Library

## Chanukah Story Times

- Wednesday, 12/3, 11am at the Hamburg Public Library
- Monday, 12/8, 10:15am at Boone Library
- Friday, 12/12, 10:30am at Exeter Community Library
- Monday, 12/15, 10:30am at Kutztown Community Library
- Wednesday, 12/17, 10:30am at Wernersville Library
- Friday, 12/19, 10am at Schuylkill Valley Public Library

Storytimes are for children ages 0-5, but all are welcome!





## 2025

## City of Reading

## Menorah Lighting

## Celebration

December 16 5:15pm  
5<sup>th</sup> and Penn Street





# Film series documentary focuses on Grodin

By Vicki Haller Graff  
Program Director

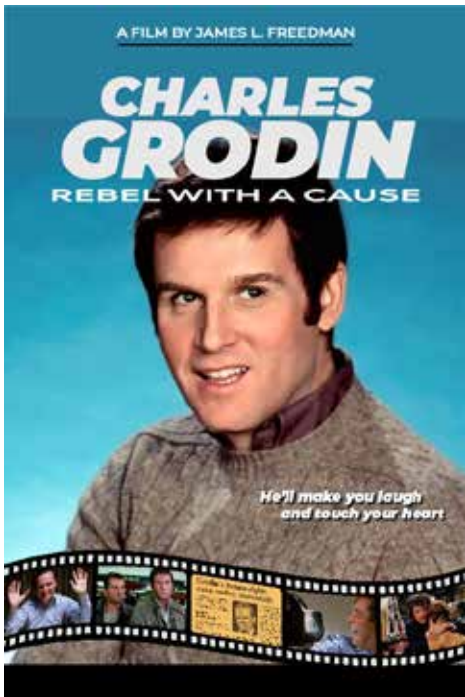
The Reading Jewish Film Series features “Charles Grodin: Rebel with a Cause” by James L. Freedman on Tuesday, Dec. 2, at 7 p.m. in the Boscov Theatre at the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts, 201 Washington St., Reading

Robert Kennedy once said, “Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope.” Charles Grodin, one of the great comedic actors of his generation (“The Heartbreak Kid,” “Midnight Run,” “Beethoven,” etc.) unleashed a tidal wave of hope — as he spent the last 20 years of his life fighting to get wrongly convicted people (most of whom were mothers of color with young children), out of prison.

The film includes interviews with Robert De Niro, Steve Martin, Martin Short, Elaine May, Carol Burnett, Alan Arkin, Paul Simon, Art Garfunkel, Ellen Burstyn, Lewis Black, Marlo Thomas, Marc Maron, Richard Kind and Jon Lovitz, plus, several of the women whom Mr. Grodin got out of prison.

Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Chuck had plans to be a journalism major at the University of Pittsburgh — but after seeing Elizabeth Taylor in “A Place in the Sun,” he decided to become an actor. In 1962 he got his first big break co-starring in the Broadway play “Tchin-Tchin.” The play was a big hit, Chuck got rave reviews, and then didn’t get another job for a year. This led him to pursue a career in writing, producing and directing as well.

In 1969 he directed Simon and Garfunkel’s first television special at the peak of their fame. Keenly sensitive to injustice, at Chuck’s urging, the special explored how the duo’s music was influenced by the turbulent 1960s. The show was about human rights, the war in Vietnam, equality among the races and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther



King.

After getting acting work in episodic television and spending several years as a TV Western villain, Chuck broke into the movies with a small but pivotal role in the classic horror movie “Rosemary’s Baby.” This was followed by a role in Mike Nichols’ “Catch-22,” which led to his breakout role in Elaine May’s 1972 film, “The Heartbreak Kid,” considered one of the top movie comedies of all time. Charles Grodin, after 17 years, was finally a movie star.

Chuck continued to create brilliant comedic performances over the next few decades in such hits as the Broadway play “Same Time, Next Year” and the films “Heaven Can Wait,” “Real Life” and “Midnight Run.”

Chuck was considered one of the funniest talk show guests ever, playing a cranky, contentious character on “The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson” and “The Late Show with David Letterman.” Later, he started a new career as a talk show host at CNBC. It started out as mostly an entertainment show but quickly morphed into an issue-oriented

program as Chuck tackled topics such as homelessness and prison reform.

Chuck dedicated the last two decades of his life to prison reform as he helped get wrongly convicted people out of prison. Relentlessly working for their release, Chuck helped reform the Rockefeller Drug Laws, which caused nonviolent first-time offenders to be locked up in droves, increasing the prison population seven-fold. At the bill signing to reform the Rockefeller Drug Laws, New York Gov. George Pataki publicly cited Charles Grodin for his work in helping to change these laws.

In 2006, this man who had never once been nominated for an acting Emmy, Tony or Oscar, yet had sent forth all those tiny ripples of hope, was honored with the William Kunstler Racial Justice Award.

Charles Grodin at his heart was a champion for justice, who not only

changed people’s lives but changed history.

\*\*\*

“Charles Grodin: Rebel with a Cause” is a documentary and plays Tuesday, Dec. 2, at 7 p.m. at GoggleWorks Center for the Arts’ Boscov Theatre. Tickets are \$10, \$8 for seniors, students, and JCC members.

Future presentations in the Reading Jewish Film Series at the GoggleWorks:

Jan. 13, 7 p.m. — “Among Neighbors.” Using live footage and stunning hand-drawn animation, Among Neighbors unearths a haunting true story of betrayal and survival in a small Polish town.

Feb. 17, 7 p.m. — “Shoshana.” A troubled love story set against the British Mandate just before the founding of the state of Israel.

Both will be screened at the GoggleWorks.

READING JEWISH FILM SERIES



Jewish Federation  
of Reading/Berks



GoggleWorks  
Center for the Arts

Monthly film screenings at Goggleworks  
New Jewish films  
November 2025 to February 2026



**Charles Grodin: Rebel with a Cause**  
December 2, 7pm  
92 minutes

Raised in a Jewish household in Pittsburgh, Charles Grodin's life embodied the concept of Tikkun Olam. The film not only celebrates Charles Grodin's hilarious acting career, but also his remarkable, decades-long, successful fight to get wrongly convicted people out of prison.  
  
The film includes interviews with Robert De Niro, Steve Martin, Martin Short, Elaine May, Carol Burnett, Paul Simon, Art Garfunkel, Alan Arkin, plus several of the women Chuck got released from prison.  
  
Directed by James L. Freedman



January 13, 7pm  
100 minutes  
not rated



February 17, 7pm  
121 minutes  
not rated

Learn more and buy tickets at  
ReadingJewishCommunity.org  
or scan the QR code.



## “Volunteering in Israel during the war”




**December 18 2:00 P.M.**  
**at the Jewish Federation**  
**1100 Berkshire Blvd. Suite 125, Wyomissing**

Come learn about Margo Levin’s recent volunteer experiences in Israel during the war.  
Optional Lunch 1:00pm \$7


To RSVP call 610-921-0624

info@jfreading.org




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# Unity coalition holds inspiring gathering

By Margo Levin and Debbie Goldberg  
**Greater Reading Unity Coalition**

The Greater Reading Unity Coalition was honored to host Richard Harwood of the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation at a gathering of Reading's community leaders.

Together we learned how to shape a new civic path built on trust, possibility, and the courage to turn outward together. For many, this was the first time in a long time that civic work in Reading felt both grounded and hopeful — not about one organization's effort, but about the will to work with collective purpose.

Thank you to Rich and his team for the inspiring message and thank you to all who attended. Let's continue keeping our Reading community moving forward!



# Shared purpose producing great results in Reading

By Sheree Haubrich

*Public Innovators Network, Centro Hispano*

When the Greater Reading Unity Coalition hosted Richard Harwood at Centro Hispano, the room wasn't filled with spectators — it was filled with builders. Community leaders, political representatives, school-district partners, grassroots conveners, innovators from our network, residents, and retirees from every corner of Reading, came not to be briefed, but to help shape a civic path built on trust, possibility, and the courage

to turn outward together.

The night didn't feel like a presentation. It felt like a gathering — a space where people were leaning in, not just listening. There was no hierarchy in the room, no divide between "decision-makers" and "community." What you felt was alignment — rising naturally from shared purpose. People didn't rush out afterward; they stayed in conversation, circling back to ideas, exchanging numbers, and reflecting together on what it means to be turned outward in a moment that often

pushes us inward.

For many, this was the first time in a long time that civic work in Reading felt both grounded and hopeful — not about one organization's effort, but about the collective will to move forward together.

People recognized themselves as part of something larger — not a campaign to watch, but a movement to join. This wasn't a meeting — it was a moment of becoming. A reminder that the future of this city will not be handed down through systems but grown through relationship and commitment.

The real significance of this gathering is that Reading saw itself — not as a fragmented city waiting on change, but as a civic engine already in motion.

## Innovation at Street Level

This summer in Reading, families didn't just hear about opportunity — they found it. The RDG Summer Programs Map created by the After School Activities (ASA) Team, became more than a link or a graphic. It became a doorway — especially for families who have spent years feeling like access was reserved for those who "knew the right person." For many parents, it was the first time the city felt like it was for their children, too.

By the end of the summer, the map had been opened more than 44,000 times — not because it trended online, but because it traveled by hand and by trust. As word spread, the Reading School District began sharing it directly with families as a tangible resource, helping parents and students discover free and low-cost enrichment opportunities across

the city. What began as a grassroots tool became a citywide connector — a simple act of coordination that turned access into equity. The story was no longer "there's nothing here for our kids." The new message is: "there is something here for us — and it's within reach."

And while the map lived online, its heartbeat lived on the street.

Ryan Cooper — a lifelong community servant — didn't just share the map. He carried it into laundromats, bodegas, barbershops, court offices, corner stores, church steps, and sidewalks where families actually stand. He met parents face to face, in their own everyday spaces.

This is what public innovation looks like when equity and belonging take root: not a rollout, not a press release — a reconnection.

And this is only the first wave.

The work ahead is already shifting from a summer map into a year-round youth resource hub, expanding this fall to include after-school programming and seasonal programming. The hub will provide clear, easy-to-navigate information and allow families to search and filter opportunities by interest, age, and location. The visual element of the map remains critical — helping parents and students see what's nearby as they navigate the very real barriers of transportation.

What started as a tool is becoming civic infrastructure — built from the ground up, held in community hands.

This is Reading in motion. This is us — moving from invisible to unmissable.

## All Around the Town

Mazel tov to **Louise Zeidman** on the engagement of her daughter, Dr. Joan Zeidman, to Dr. David Fish, both of Philadelphia.

Send good news to Marknem@aol.com or call 610-921-0624.

*Until next time: Shalom!*

## Obituary

**Diane Schreiber**, 84, former longtime Reading resident, died on Oct. 27 in State College. Diane's greatest joy came from being surrounded by those

she loved, and most of all from her marriage of more than 65 years to her late husband, Howie. She is survived by her children Pamela Lippitt (Scott), Todd (Tara), Roberta, Rick (Staci) and Joshua (Ali) and eight grandchildren.

## Dementia Friends: Changing the way we think, act and talk about dementia!



Become a Dementia Friend by attending an interactive information session to learn about living with dementia and the small things you can do to show support to members of your community.

**Thursday, December 4<sup>th</sup> 2025 at 2:00pm**  
**at the Jewish Federation**  
**1100 Berkshire Blvd. Suite 125, Wyomissing**

RSVP to 610-921-0624 or email [Caroler@jfreeding.org](mailto:Caroler@jfreeding.org)



## MEET THE NEW CEO

*Cindy Gerber Tomlinson*



**Thursday, December 4**  
**5:30pm - 7:30pm**  
**at the JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd. Suite 125., Wyomissing**

Come mix, mingle and nosh with your friends, meet new people, and meet the new CEO of Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks! Cindy will share her thoughts about what Federation has been accomplishing and her plans for the future. She invites you to share YOUR ideas about what you wish to see from YOUR Federation. Bring your friends!

RSVP to [info@jfreeding.org](mailto:info@jfreeding.org) or call 610-921-0624  
Kosher deli will be served





# A Thanksgiving thanks to our Reading Jewish community

By Carole Robinson  
Director, Jewish Family Service

The ideal Thanksgiving should include family, lots of good food, and gratitude for our bounty. I hope all of you enjoyed a happy, festive feast. Yet across the nation, many families are struggling to afford food. They often face impossible choices — between feeding their children, paying rent, or keeping the heat on.

No one should ever face this dilemma. It's why Helping Harvest Fresh Food Bank, with JFS as an agency partner, has been fighting hunger in Berks and Schuylkill Counties for over 40 years. However, with the recent federal funding cuts, the demand for food at Helping Harvest has surged beyond its normal capacity. It makes our community support even more essential!

Our JFS food pantry volunteers can attest to the unprecedented uptick in food insecurity and how we work together to ensure that those who are most vulnerable are not forgotten:

- At our **JFS Olivet Food Pantry**, cars snaked past the clubhouse to the end of the road (about a quarter-mile) and back again. I struck up a conversation with David, the man in the ninth car in line. He got to our pantry at 7:30 pm, 15 hours before our pantry was scheduled to open, to make sure he got the food he needed.



Max Ribner, left, in front of JFS's emergency food donations At right, a grateful JFS Food Pantry client on Nov. 5



One woman stood in line between the cars, moving up with each departed car. Her husband needed to pick up their young son, and she was unwilling to lose her place in line, so she placed herself in danger to get her family's food. We even had clients from a nearby homeless encampment.

- Everyone was desperate to receive their turkey breast, their Thanksgiving box of shelf-stable food along with other canned goods, meat, and produce. And they were so appreciative of our help. We were thanked repeatedly by individuals living on Social Security, people with high medical

bills, and those who are working and still can't make ends meet. One grateful food recipient even got out of her car and joined us in breaking down boxes for recycling as her way of contributing.

- At our **JFS SDA Food Pantry**, the frigid weather and blustery winds didn't discourage our volunteers, including our client volunteers, who show up every month and work alongside us for hours, before accepting their food. And the weather did not deter the endless line of people waiting in cars for their food.

Continued on Page 9

## Volunteers work to feed community



Paula Bub and Jan Simon are smiling despite the frigid temperature during the JFS food distribution on Nov. 11. At right, pantry volunteers prior to food distribution on Nov. 5.



### Many thanks to our November Food Pantry Volunteers who distributed food to about 670 households.

- |                    |                 |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Allison Althouse   | John Incledon   | Russ Shanahan   |
| Cindy Balchunas    | Pete Jacobson   | Jan Simon       |
| Paula Bub          | Sid Lempiner    | Brad Snyder     |
| Marc Filstein      | Lisa Levine     | Oleg Umanov     |
| Sam Flamholz       | Annette Peppard | Phyllis Warshaw |
| Sarah Flamholz     | Jenn Reilly     | Michael Warshaw |
| Sharon Gernsheimer | Mike Robinson   |                 |
| Patty Hartman      | Mike Schein     |                 |
| Katie Huey         | Ellen Schwartz  |                 |





# THANKS

Continued from Page 8

Overall, we served over 337 households there and another 333 at Olivet, achieving a new record of 670 households served in November. With that, I must thank you for filling our food collection bins to the brim, giving generous monetary donations for Helping Harvest and volunteering your time to help those facing food insecurity. Your response to our JFS Emergency Food Drive exceeded all expectations!

Although I am grateful to everyone who contributed tzedakah, I am especially touched by our youngest donor, 6-year-old Max Ribner. Max and his grandmother Miriam Ribner went to the grocery store, where he chose his favorite canned vegetables, fruit and other items to help feed hungry children. Then they lugged the overflowing bags of groceries into my office. Max proudly added his cans to our tower of food donations, explaining, “I want other kids to have good food to eat.”

Thanks to Max and our other generous donors, we were able to give many children and their families a happy Thanksgiving!

While there was a happy outcome for so many families this past month, it’s important to note that the work is far from over. Even though we are no longer matching funds, monetary donations and food donations can always be made to JFS for our food pantries. Jewish tradition teaches, “You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.” Pirkei Avot.

## Thank you to everyone who contributed to the JFS Emergency Food Drive

### Emergency Food Monetary Donations:

*Isadore and Anna Oritsky - Gladys and Eli Skaist Philanthropic Fund*

Mary Anne and Jon Avins	Vicki Graff
Sue and Mel Blum	Emily Hollinger
Sheila and Jeff Bornstein	Karen and Martin Jacobson
Cindy and Brett Chronister	Carrie and Stephen Latman
Lynn and Jeff Driben	Holly and Brian Michelson
Scott Eddinger	Solange and Paul Mintz
Sue and Mike Farrara	Carole and Mike Robinson
Marcia and Marc Filstein	Esther and Russ Shanahan
Sandra Fishman	Susan Schlanger
Mike and Susan Fromm	Normal Sigal
Michael Gage	Janine and Bruce Ure
Debbie and David Goldberg	Corinne and Andy Wernick

### Emergency Food Donations:

Sheila Bornstein, Scott Eddinger, Sarah and Sam Flamholz, Jen Gurwitz, Miriam and Max Ribner, Mike Robinson, David Rosenker, Mike Schein, Amanda Wertz

## Fun and fellowship at Friendship Circle



Annette Peppard and Dorie Karp at Annette’s Friendship Circle program on hearing loss on Oct. 23. At right, Bret Miller and Cindy Gerber Tomlinson chatting at Friendship Circle on Nov. 6 Friendship Circle meets twice a month with fun and educational programs and great fellowship.

## FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

### Dec 4 - “Dementia Friends ”

Come learn about living with dementia and the small things you can do to show support for your community members.

### Dec 18- “Volunteering in Israel during the war”

We’ll celebrate Chanukah and learn about Margo Levin’s recent volunteer experiences in Israel during the war.



Friendship Circle is held twice a month on Thursday afternoons at 1:00 p.m at the JCC. An optional lunch is served, followed by an entertaining or educational program or holiday celebration.

Programs are free; optional lunch is \$7. Contact Carole at 610-921-0624 to make lunch reservations.



# December 2025

# Kis

12.02 12:00 pm

**JCC ROMEO Club**  
*Tuesday, December 2, 12:00 pm*

"Retired old men eating out" meets monthly for camaraderie and conversation. Newcomers are always welcome.

Location: Paolo's 2480 Lancaster Pike, Reading

12.02 4:00 pm

**JCC Bus Trip to the 76ers' game**  
*Tuesday, December 2, 4:00 pm*

Join us as we recognize the Philadelphia area's Jewish community for a night of pride, connection and hoops. Bus leaves the JCC at 4pm, game at 7pm.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

12.04 5:30 pm

**JFR Meet and Greet with the CEO**  
*Thursday, December 4, 5:30 pm*

Come mix, mingle and with your friends and meet the new CEO of Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks. Bring your friends! Kosher deli will be served. RSVP required.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

12.07 10:00 am

**JCC Estate Planning Seminar**  
*Sunday, December 7, 10:00 am*

Estate planning is one of the most meaningful ways to care for the people and the community we love. Attend this workshop offered by Antanavage Farbiarz PLLC. 9:30am Bagels, 10am Program

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

12.14 4:00pm

**RCOS Sisterhood Chanukah Party**  
*Sunday, December 14, 4:00 pm*

Join your fellow congregants at RCOS for a delicious Chanukah dinner, dessert buffet, and a fun DIY Menorah contest! What menorah will you make?

Location: RCOS, 555 Warwick Dr., Wyomissing

12.15 5:30 pm

**Chabad Chanukah Fry Fest**  
*Monday, December 15, 5:30 pm*

Chanukah party featuring family entertainment!

Location: Chabad, 2320 Hampden Blvd, Reading

12.18 1:00 pm

**JFS Friendship Circle**  
*Thursday, December 18, 1:00 pm*

Volunteering in Israel during the war; we'll celebrate Hannukah and learn about Margo Levin's recent volunteer experiences in Israel during the war. Lunch is \$7 at 1pm, free program at 2pm.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

12.18 7:00 pm

**RCOS Latkes and Vodka**  
*Thursday, December 18, 7:00 pm*

Join Rabbi Michelson for a tasting of different latke recipes each paired with a special spirit. Non-drinkers welcome. \$12 per person.

Location: RCOS, 555 Warwick Dr., Wyomissing



# Shevat 5786 to Tevet 5786

12.02 7:00 pm

**Reading Jewish Film Series:  
Charles Grodin**  
*Tuesday, December 2, 7:00 pm*

Charles Grodin: Rebel with a Cause is a documentary about Jewish comedic actor Charles Grodin, who is remembered not just for his hilarious acting career, but also his decades long commitment to Tikkun Olam.

Location: GoggleWorks, 201 Washington St., Rdg

12.04 1:00 pm

**JFS Friendship Circle**  
*Thursday, December 4, 1:00 pm*

Dementia Friends is an interactive information session to learn about living with dementia and the small things you can do to show support to members of your community. Lunch is \$7 at 1pm, free program at 2pm.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

12.10 12:00 pm

**JCC Noontime Knowledge**  
*Wednesday, December 10, 12:00 pm*

"Unappreciated in their Time: Jewish Female Modern Artists." This talk by Sara Howells will celebrate these women who changed the narrative of post-war Modern art.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

12.13 10:00 am

**RCOS Tot Shabbat**  
*Saturday, December 13, 10:00 am*

Rabbi Michelson leads a musical shabbat with Cantor Stuart Binder for children ages 0-7 and their caregivers. Open to all families. Stay after for the tasty oneg!

Location: RCOS, 555 Warwick Drive, Wyo.

12.16 12:00 pm

**JCC Noontime Knowledge**  
*Tuesday, December 16, 12:00 pm*

Join us for a lively presentation by Jesse Bernstein of Theatre Ariel that is part talk and part performance, in which Jewish plays serve as a springboard for exploring the rich history and evolution of Jews in Diaspora.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

12.16 5:15 pm

**City of Reading Menorah Lighting**  
*Tuesday, December 16, 5:15 pm*

Celebrate Chanukah with the whole community! Bring your friends and neighbors to the public menorah lighting in Reading.

Location: 5th and Penn Streets, Reading

12.21 7:00 pm

**KZ Hanukkah Party**  
*Sunday, December 21, 7:00 pm*

Attend the Keshet Zion Hanukkah party for Latkes, Donuts, Games, and Prizes!

Location: KZ, 555 Warwick Dr. Wyomissing

12.29 1:00 pm

**JCC Movie Monday**  
*Monday, December 29, 1:00 pm*

End the year with a laugh. Bad Shabbos is a very dark comedy about a Shabbos dinner gone horribly wrong. It was the opening film of the Reading Jewish Film Series this year.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing



# Our community embodies the light of Hanukkah

**By Rabbi Brian Michelson**  
*Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom*

As the days grow shorter and the nights longer, our community once again prepares to celebrate the Festival of Lights — Hanukkah. Each year, this occasion reminds us not only of the miracle of oil that lasted eight days in the ancient Temple but also of the enduring strength of the Jewish spirit and the importance of holding onto hope during dark times.



Hanukkah is often seen as a children's holiday, filled with spinning dreidels, sizzling latkes, jelly donuts and songs sung in candlelight. While these traditions bring warmth and laughter to our homes, the deeper meaning of Hanukkah shines even brighter. The story of the Maccabees reminds us that even a small group of dedicated people can create significant change when they act with courage and conviction.

This year, our community will gather as individuals, families or a larger community to light the menorah, adding one more flame each night. The candles symbolize not only the ancient miracle

but also the sparks of kindness and compassion we are meant to bring into the world through our actions. By lighting these candles, we affirm that even the smallest light can dispel great darkness.

I am continually inspired by how our community embodies that light. Volunteers have prepared food for those in need, our community food bank helps those at risk of hunger, and families have opened their homes to share meals and stories. These acts — profound yet simple — reflect the essence of Hanukkah: faith in action, light shared freely, and joy that multiplies when given away.

In a world that often feels divided or uncertain, the menorah reminds us to focus on what unites us. Its glow reaches beyond faith or background—it's a symbol of resilience and the human ability to bring light where it is needed most.

As we gather around our menorahs this Hanukkah, may we remember that each of us has the power to bring light to the world. Let our lights shine not only in our windows but also through our words and actions. May this season bring peace, warmth, and renewed hope to all who celebrate.

Chag Urim Sameach — Happy Festival of Lights!

# How secular culture can influence Hanukkah

**By Rabbi Ted Prosnitz**  
*Kesher Zion Synagogue*

At least since H a l l o w e e n , commercial interests have been promoting Christmas. In November, our secular culture's h o l i d a y of Thanksgiving was influenced by the Jewish fall harvest festival, Sukkot. In December, how can our secular culture influence the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah?



against the Syrian-Greeks in 164 BCE. (Yes, the land was a Jewish province within the Greek Empire. Muslims were not on the historical scene for another 700 years.) The Jews living in Judea fought to maintain their religion — belief in the One God, and their culture — circumcision and Torah study.

A Psalm; a Song at the Dedication of the House of David, begins Psalm 30, which is part of each day's Hanukkah liturgical service. Yet the House, that is the Temple, is nowhere mentioned in the psalm. Rather, David thanks God for delivering him from enemies around him, and from self-aggrandizement within him. The psalm concludes, "O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto Thee forever."

What then is dedicated? The

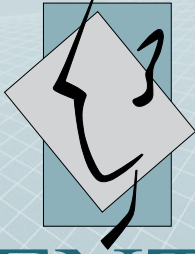
Temple as the communal place for prayer has been replaced with synagogues. Yet the primary place to celebrate the Festival of Lights is at home. Adoshem ori v'ishi/the Lord is my light and my salvation (Ps. 27:1). We are dedicating ourselves.

To the extent that the secular culture in which we Jews (2.4% of the population of The United States of America) live promotes deveikut/ connection with the Divine and encourages personal resolutions, it can positively influence our Hanukkah/ Dedication observances. In fact, Psalm 30 is part of every day's morning prayer service. We can dedicate ourselves daily to what God expected of Abraham's descendants — derech Adoshem (Gen. 18:19) — justice and righteousness.

The holiday of Hanukkah, beyond its military and political history, maintains its meaning if God, Torah, and Israel are part and parcel of Jewry today. As we celebrate the rededication of God's footstool on earth, may we rededicate ourselves to bringing God into our souls. The lights we light on the Hanukkiyah, and the lights around us at this time, can make us mindful of a saying from Proverbs (6:23): "For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is a light".

As our civil calendar concludes, and New Year's Resolutions may be considered, consider how our faith and traditions can help you make it a good year for you, your family, friends, and community.

Chag Chanukkah Sameach, and  
Happy New Year!



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# When light follows us everywhere: Finding home wherever we find ourselves

By Rabbi Yosef Lipsker  
Chabad Center of Berks County

As we enter the days of Chanukah, we speak endlessly about light — how a tiny flame can overpower darkness, how holiness spreads from one home outward, how miracles occur not only in the past, in the Holy Temple but in the journeys of ordinary people.



This year, I am reminded of the message of Chanukah through the weekly Torah portion of Vayeitzei, where G-d promises our forefather, Jacob: *“Ufaratzta Yama V’keidmah, Tzofonah v’negbah”* — “And you shall spread out - Westward, Eastward, Northward and Southward.”

At first glance, it sounds almost unusual as a blessing.

Why is it a blessing to be scattered in all directions?

Why is it a blessing to have children spread across the world — far from each other, far from home?

The answer came to life for me in a dramatic way about 28 years ago, long before cellphones, GPS or the comfort of instant communication.

My sister-in-law, brother-in-law and their young family, were driving from New York to spend Shabbat with us. It was one of those hectic Fridays — heavy traffic, restless kids, the winter sun dropping quickly.

And then somewhere on Interstate 78, their car burst into flames.

Thank G-d, they escaped unharmed - but they were stranded, shaken, and with no way to contact us.

This was the era when a phone call meant finding a payphone, hoping it worked and hoping you had a quarter in your pocket. Police officers arrived, helped them to safety and brought them to a local station, where they were allowed one phone call.

They managed to reach us not too long before the onset of Shabbat to tell us “the car is gone ... we’re safe ... but we have nowhere to go. It’s almost Shabbat”.

They could not drive. They could not

make it to us. They were stuck — physically and emotionally — in a frightening limbo.

With no idea what to do, I dialed a friend of mine who lived somewhere in New Jersey. I didn’t know exactly where my family were stranded. I just said a silent prayer and made the call.

What happened next still gives me chills.

I told him roughly where they were.

There was a pause.

And he said:

“Yosef, that’s my exit. They’re minutes from my house.” Minutes from Chabad of Basking Ridge, where our family was taken in and enjoyed a beautiful Shabbat with warm food, safety and peace.

My in-laws walked into Shabbos embraced by people who were like family. They sang, ate, rested, and lit up the home with the light they carried within them.

And when I opened the the Torah portion that week, I saw Jacob’s blessing: *“Ufaratzta”* — You will spread out everywhere.

And I understood.

The Jewish People are not scattered.

We are not far from home.

We are everywhere because G-d ensured that wherever a Jew travels, another Jew is waiting there with an open

door.

Jacob’s children are meant to fill the world like candle flames spreading light.

Chanukah teaches the same truth:

A flame does not lose anything by lighting another candle - it simply creates more light.

So too, the Jewish People.

Wherever we go — North, South, East, West — we bring light, and we find light already waiting for us.

The Shabbat my sister and brother-in-law had was not a tragedy — it was a miracle.

It was a reminder that being spread out is not exile — it is purpose.

It is connection.

It is family — everywhere.

This Chanukah, let’s remember that wherever a Jew stands, he is never alone.

Wherever a Jewish family gets stuck — even minutes before Shabbat on a dark highway, G-d’s network is already in place.

That is the true blessing of Ufaratzta.

Not that we are far from home...

but that home is wherever we are.

May the flames of Chanukah remind us that the light we share connects us across every border and every distance, and that every Jewish home, no matter where it stands, is part of one great, bright, eternal menorah.

## JFS hospital, outpatient visits

By Carole Robinson  
and Sari Incledon

Jewish Family Service social workers visit Jewish patients at local hospitals, senior communities, nursing homes and rehab centers.

Our goal in these visits is both to be friendly and supportive at a difficult time, and to provide access to social services that supplement and complement the case managers at these locations.

If you or a loved one is at a local hospital or nursing home and would like

a visit, please call us.

If you or a loved one are treated at a hospital out of our area we are also available for follow-up visits upon discharge.

At times of ill health, stress or crisis, families are often looking for information about home care, transportation services, senior communities, nursing homes and rehabs. This is what we’re here for.

Please call Jewish Family Service social workers for help at 610-921-0624.

### Your Clothes Can Change Lives

Donate your gently used  
clothes to CommunityAid to  
help JFS (partner #50100)  
support those in need.

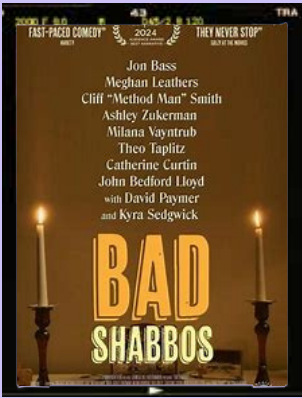


CommunityAid  
THRIFT STORE  
AND DONATION CENTER  
5370 Allentown Pike  
Temple, PA 19560

or in our parking lot bin

Jewish Federation  
of Reading/Berks  
1100 Berkshire Blvd  
Wyomissing, PA 19610

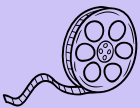
## Movie Monday at the JCC December 29, 2025, 1pm



### Bad Shabbos

all star ensemble cast led by  
Kyra Sedgwick

a hilarious ensemble  
dark comedy



An engaged interfaith couple are about to have their parents meet for the first time over a Shabbat dinner when an accidental death gets in the way.

Jewish Federation  
of Reading/Berks

Grab a seat for a Jewish themed movie each month at the JCC (1100 Berkshire Blvd., Ste. 125, Wyomissing). It is usually held on the 4th Monday of the month, and the popcorn and the movie are both free!

## Save the Date

For Kesher Zion’s Annual  
Hanukkah Party

Sunday December 21st  
7PM

**Latkas  
Donuts  
Games  
Prizes**



# Remembering a great summer at camp

By Adam Leisawitz

Camp Ramah is such a special place — I love it!! Whether it's playing soccer, swimming or doing mosaics, there is always something fun to do. At camp, my soccer coach was an Israeli that actually coached professional soccer in Israel!

Summer 2025 was my first time experiencing Maccabiah (color war). The whole camp participated, and I was on team "adom" (red). We dressed up head to toe in our color and did lots of fun challenges from waterslide kickball to a lunch where we could only speak in Hebrew! We didn't end up winning, but we had a lot of fun!

My favorite time at camp is definitely Shabbat! On Friday afternoon the whole camp gets ready and Friday night you welcome Shabbat in with a service overlooking the lake. After services and dinner, the whole camp sings "zimirot"

(shabbat songs) and bangs on the tables. My first summer, I didn't know any of the songs, but this year it was great singing everything I had learned last year, and our counselors encouraged us to sing as loud as we could. So, I did! At camp on Saturdays, you are also given an opportunity to lead different parts of the service, and this was the first year I read Torah on Shabbat. I worked hard learning it and was excited to chant it for the first time at camp. I already signed up for next summer and I am looking forward to playing lots of sports, enjoying time with my friends and learning more about my Judaism.

*Adam Leisawitz received a scholarship from the Jewish Federation of Reading to attend a Jewish summer camp. Learn more and apply: [readingjewishcommunity.org/youth-and-education](https://readingjewishcommunity.org/youth-and-education)*



Adam and Leah Leisawitz at Camp Ramah.

# Recent speaker in Reading honored for his human rights work

Courtesy of Penn State

Penn State Professor Boaz Dvir, the speaker at the Yashek Holocaust Lecture at Albright College on March 27, is the inaugural recipient of the university's Nicholas P. Jones Faculty Award, which recognizes integrity, loyalty, human-centered leadership, academic excellence and impact in Penn State faculty.

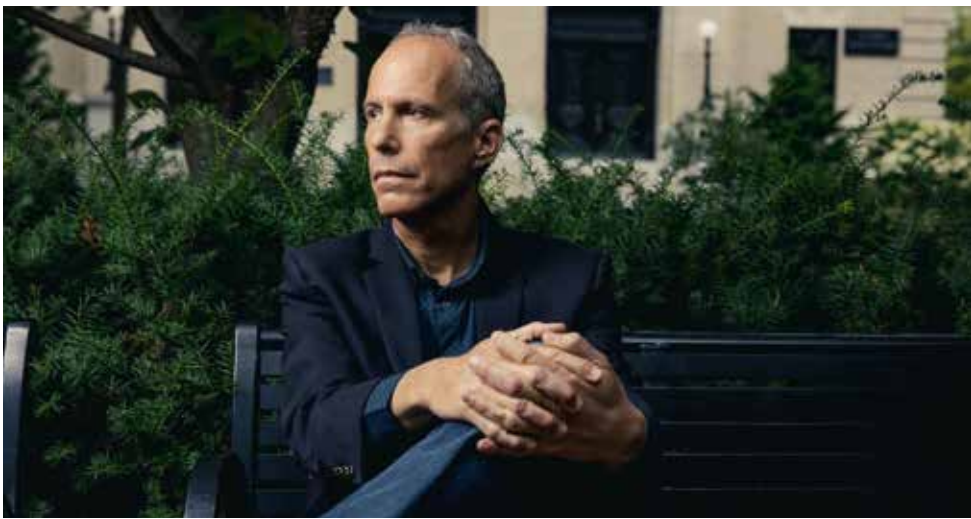
Dvir's topic during his Reading visit was a newly creative way to teach subjects in a way that will significantly reduce all forms of bigotry, including antisemitism. The idea is to reduce the likelihood of another Holocaust and genocide. So far the initiative has been used and impacted 3,000 teachers and 95,000 students in six states. In Berks County, the Human Relations education initiative is being used in the Reading and Wyomissing school districts.

Dvir is Donald P. Bellisario Career Advancement Professor in Penn State's Department of Journalism. He has created

and led award-winning documentaries delivering stories of ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances, such as "Class of Her Own," "Jessie's Dad" and "To Kill a Nazi" (formerly titled "Cojot").

"I'm drawn to ordinary human beings who go through trying times and challenges and rise up to that occasion and become leaders and trailblazers," Dvir said. "I didn't set out to do that. But when I look back, I realize all my protagonists follow that arc."

Dvir is founding director of Penn State's Hammel Family Human Rights Initiative and the Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Education Initiative. Through these initiatives, Pennsylvania K-12 educators get to connect with Penn State faculty who contribute expertise on teaching difficult social and historical topics, use of media in the classroom, trauma-informed pedagogy, the Holocaust, gender studies, human rights violations, international law, art education and more.



Penn State Professor Boaz Dvir has been honored for his human rights work.

MLK DAY

OF SERVICE

2026 MLK YOUTH DAY OF SERVICE

Projects accessible to 5+ years old. Adult volunteers welcome!

✓

MONDAY JANUARY 19TH

10AM - 12PM

✓

IMMANUEL UCC

99 S WAVERLY ST. SHILLINGTON

✓

Food Packing, Sandwich Making, Card Design, No-Sew Blankets

Questions /RSVP

iucc19607@gmail.com

or info@jfreeding.org

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AWARD-WINNING

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PURPOSEFUL LIVING

Our approach to memory support emphasizes connection, engagement and joy. Residents thrive in a nature-connected neighborhood where they're supported by life-enriching activities tailored to personal interests and abilities. It's all about purposeful living for your loved one, and peace of mind for you.

See for yourself — scan to learn more or call 610.775.2300 to schedule your tour.

Jewish Federation

OF READING/BERKS

IMMANUEL

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OMEB SHOLOM



# Yocum preschool honors Jewish traditions

**By Elsa Mierzejewski**  
*Director of Preschool/Kindergarten,  
Yocum Institute for Arts Education*  
During the week of Sukkot in October, Yocum Institute for Arts Education's preschool and kindergarten classes

learned about the Jewish holiday Sukkot, a harvest festival, celebrating the harvest and the journey in the desert of the Israelites many years ago.  
We enjoyed hearing another Sammy Spider story, "Sammy Spider's First

Sukkot" by Sylvia A. Rouss, illustrated by Katherine Janus Kahn. We enjoyed learning about, gathering and having snacks in our makeshift sukkah on our playground.  
In addition, the Kindergarten/Discovery

classroom has officially been named the Lakin Early Childhood Enrichment Classroom.  
This sign serves as a visual reminder of our connection to the Lakin Preschool.



*Children at the Yocum Institute preschool enjoy time in their playground sukkah! Sukkot story: Right, kindergarteners listen to a Sukkot story. Below, the Kindergarten and Discovery classroom at the Yocum Institute now includes a sign that reads "Lakin Early Childhood Enrichment Classroom"*



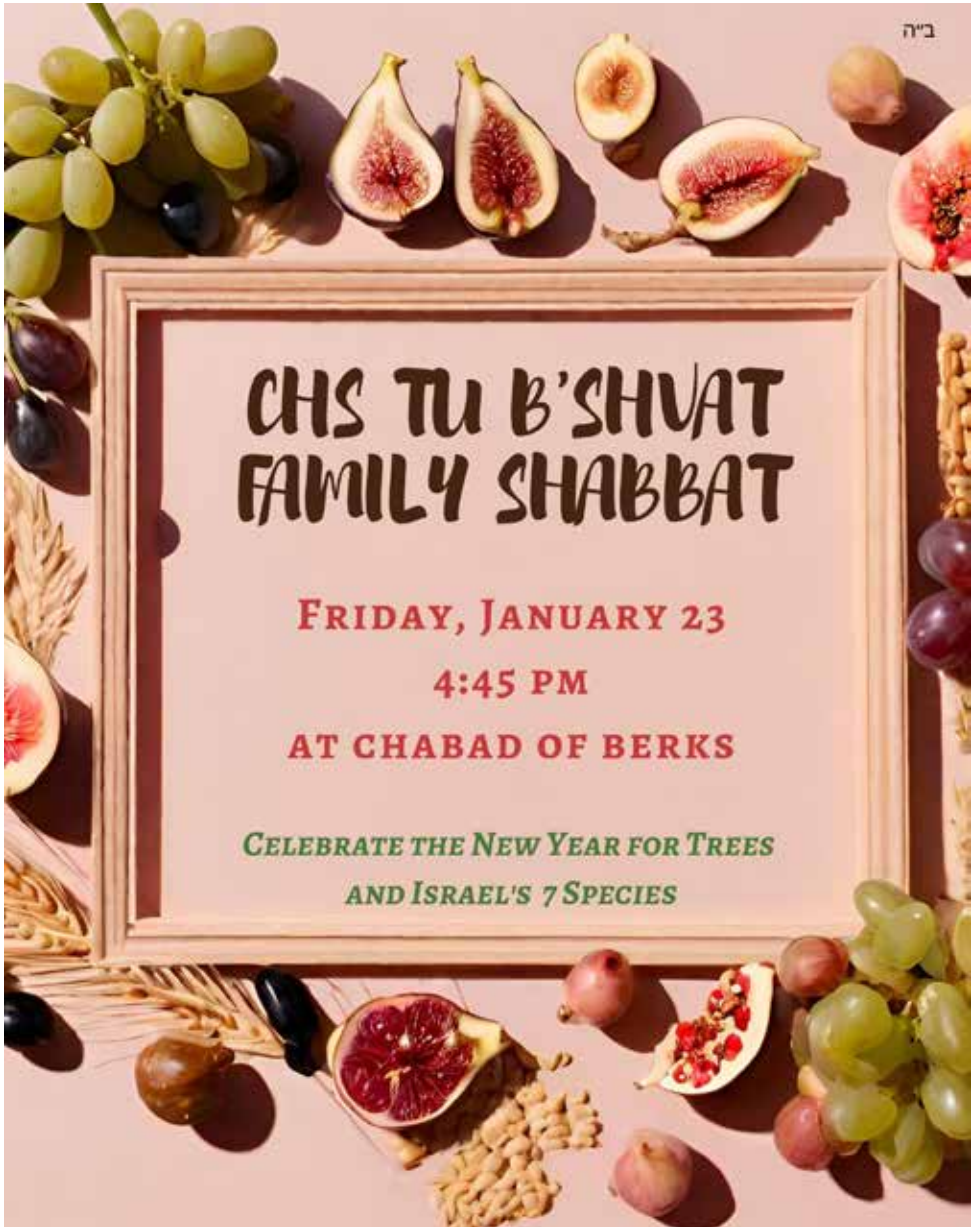
Join RCOS For A

# MUSICAL SHABBAT

**DECEMBER 12, 2025**  
Friday, 7:00 PM

Members of Tach'shitim (Jewels), an a capella choir from Bet Mishpachach: the LGBT Synagogue in Washington, DC, will be joining Cantor Binder for a beautiful evening of music.

**A Special Membership Committee Oneg Shabbat to follow**





# Leadership event, lecture bring knowledge, camaraderie

**By Richard Bradbury**  
Development Director

Prior to the 45th Annual Leo Camp Memorial Lecture on Wednesday, Oct. 29th, Leadership member/donors, Federation Board members, David Camp (son of Leo Camp) and his family and community and elected leaders were invited to gather for a dinner at Albright College's Freedman Gallery with our guest speaker, former U.S. Ambassador Dr. Daniel C. Kurtzer. Albright College facilities and events planner, Josue Matos, transformed the recently vacated Freedman Gallery into a sophisticated and intimate space for our 54 pre-lecture guests.

Arriving guests were greeted with unique and beautifully presented hors d'oeuvres, and refreshments featuring wines, and sparkling pomegranate and blue curacao cocktails (a toast to Israel). The room was buzzing with networking, noshing, and schmoozing, making Federation staff realize "we must create more opportunities for our community to gather and socialize." The energized

conversation and reconnecting with good friends made it a challenge to actually begin the dinner!

Once guests were seated and a blessing offered, we were treated to a deliciously prepared dinner of roasted beet salad, exquisitely prepared salmon, fingerling potatoes and roasted root veggies. Sarah Mezquita's staff and Chef Brooke truly outdid themselves! As coffee and tea service began, Dr. Irene Langram, Vice President for Academic Affairs, welcomed guests to the Albright campus, and CEO Cindy Gerber Tomlinson introduced our guest of honor, Dr. Kurtzer, who gave a brief, intimate chat of his analysis of the current situation between Israel and Gaza since the start of the U.S.-brokered cease-fire.

After the dinner, guests made the short walk (or ride via golf cart!) to Albright College's South Lounge for the Annual Leo Camp Memorial Lecture featuring Dr. Kurtzer's lecture, "Is the Middle East at an Inflection Point?." Over 135 people attended the lecture, which is free and always open to the public. After the



*Socializing fun at the Leadership program prior to the Leo Camp Lecture*

lecture, guests were treated to a dessert reception featuring outrageous sweets prepared by Albright College catering. The events provided our guests with an extraordinary evening of knowledge, engagement and camaraderie.

If you would like more information about joining Jewish Federation's Leadership, please contact Richard Bradbury, Development Director, at 610-921-0624 or email him at richardb@jfreeding.org.



*Top, Jennifer Koosed and Dr. Daniel C. Kurtzer. Above, Dr. Kurtzer takes questions.*

## JFS TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

This program provides transportation to members of the Jewish community, age 60 and over or those with disabilities, who have no other way of getting around. It allows participants to retain their independence and keeps them from becoming homebound and isolated. It can be used for medical appointments, synagogue attendance, shopping and other errands.

It is easy to participate. Purchase a book of 25 taxi tickets from the Federation at a cost of \$25. Each coupon is worth \$3. The phone number for Reading Metro Taxi is on the ticket book. Call the company and arrange your ride. At the end of the ride, sign your coupon(s) before giving them to the driver. Tipping is left to the passenger's discretion. Coupon does not include cost of tipping.

*Program subsidized by  
The Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks*

## Latkes & Vodkas



**An Adult Chanukkah Event**

**Join Rabbi Michelson for a tasting of  
different Latke recipes  
each paired with a special spirit.**

**(non-drinkers welcome)**

**Thursday, December 18 @ 7:00 pm**

**\$12.00 per person**

**<https://ohebsholom.org/latkes-and-vodkas/>**



**Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom  
555 Warwick Drive, Reading, PA 19610**

The community is invited to  
Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom

# HANUKKAH PARTY!

**Sunday, December 14, 2025  
4-7PM**

Dinner, Latkes and Dessert!  
DIY Menorah Contest!  
Games, Crafts and Music!

Sponsored by RCOS Sisterhood  
on-site security personnel

REFORM CONGREGATION  
OHEB SHOLOM

Jewish Federation



# A busy fall around the community



Left: We were pleased to welcome Dani Wassner from the JFNA to our local Federation to give a talk about life in Israel now. Right: Exeter Community Library hosted Jewish Book Council author Talia Carner, seen here with Sue Fararra, Nancy Russo and Carole Robinson.



Left: John Incledon, retired professor from Albright College, led a course on short stories of Jewish fiction in October and November. Right: The RCOS Jewish Food and Cultural Festival was a smashing success once again.



Please Join Us on  
Friday, December 19, 2025



For more information please call the office at (610)374-1763  
or email us at kesharzionoffice@gmail.com



Above, RCOS Religious School students helped prepare lunch at Opportunity House. Below, Lisa Levine is among the KZ Social Action Committee volunteers who joined Wyomissing Church of the Brethren to prepare a meal for the New Journey Food Bank.





# KZ Bingo/Tricky Tray fundraiser a huge success

## Kesher Zion Synagogue

The spirit of community and fun was in full swing on Sunday, October 26, as Kesher Zion hosted its first ever Bingo/Tricky Tray Fundraiser. The event drew a large, enthusiastic crowd for an afternoon filled with excitement and laughter.

From the moment the doors opened, guests were treated to delicious food, fabulous prizes, and lot of chances to win both cash and prizes. Tables were filled as players laughed and enjoyed the camaraderie of those around them. It was a pleasure to see so many people in the Berks County community coming out to support KZ! It was truly a room filled with

warmth, laughter and love.

By the end of the day, everyone left with smiles, some with prizes, all with great memories. The success of this year's fundraiser not only supports Kesher Zion's programs and activities but also strengthens the bonds within the congregation and the Berks County community.

We are already talking about next year's Bingo/Tricky Tray and are looking for to it being even bigger and better — so we will be looking for you to join in the fun!

Thank you to everyone who attended, donated, volunteered, and supported Kesher Zion. We can't wait to see you again next year!



# We ran for their lives — they are finally home

## By Amana Gibbs

For two years, the global Run for Their Lives movement united communities around the world in a single call: Bring Them Home Now. For the last 15 months, the Reading/Wyomissing chapter gathered every Sunday — walking, running, and showing steady solidarity with the families of the Israeli hostages. What began as a small local effort became a consistent source of compassion, visibility, and hope.

We walked for families as they pleaded for news. We walked for them through long months of uncertainty. And now, we walk with them in relief and healing. With nearly all surviving

hostages finally returned home, our chapter closes this period of grief with gratitude. All but three — who will be laid to rest — have been brought back to their families.

Throughout the past year and a half, our group created a space for conversation, reflection and support across generations. Children, teens, adults, and neighbors passing by found room to ask questions, share emotions, and learn about the hostages and their families with honesty and compassion.

To everyone who joined us or rallied us onward in Reading / Wyomissing: your consistency and kindness mattered. Every step and every conversation affirmed our shared humanity — and the



hostage families felt that support.

It has been an honor to organize and sustain this effort here in Berks County.

Our community showed that even a small group can shine a meaningful light during the darkest of times.

## COMMUNITY MINYAN

Please help Kesher Zion make a minyan on the first and third Thursday of every month, so those needing to say Kaddish are able to do so.

**Open to the entire Reading Jewish community!**  
**All are welcome!**

**Minyan at Kesher Zion**  
**7:00 - 7:20 PM**  
**555 Warwick Drive**

**DECEMBER 4**  
**DECEMBER 18**

**For more information,**  
**contact the Kesher Zion office at**  
**610.374.1763**  
**kesherzionoffice@gmail.com**

## JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE NEEDS:

**PLASTIC GROCERY BAGS FOR OUR FOOD PANTRIES!**

THANK YOU  
THANK YOU  
THANK YOU  
THANK YOU

DROP YOUR BAGS AT OUR OFFICE 1100 BERKSHIRE BLVD SUITE 125 MONDAY TO FRIDAY 9:00 AM TO 3:00PM.

 Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks



**Federation Honorarium-Memorial Card Information**

Please mail your payment with complete information to the Jewish Federation, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Suite 125, Wyomissing 19610, or bring to the Jewish Cultural Center at the same address. You may set up a “savings account” for the purpose of sending cards. Please contact the Federation at 610-921-0624 for further information.

**Contributions as of Nov. 14**

**Federation Jewish Community Campaign**  
In memory of:  
Diane Schreiber – Bernie and Carol Gerber

**PJ Library**  
In memory of:  
Stuart Cohn - George Viener

**Jewish Family Service**  
In memory of:  
Seth Feldman’s father - Helene and Henry Singer  
Stephanie(Spector) Emerson - Bob and Sheila Spector

**Jewish Family Service Taxi**  
In memory of:  
Josephine Charnoff - Michael and Barbara Charnoff

SAVE THE DATE

Mediterranean Nights

Join your friends at RCOS for an evening of music, fun, and great mediterranean cuisine!

SATURDAY, APRIL 11 @ 6:30 pm

Cocktails, Dinner, Music  
& Balis Volunteer Appreciation Award presentation to Jill Haas

REFORM CONGREGATION OHEB SHOLOM

**Honorariums and Memorials**

Contributions may be made to the following Funds:

- Federation Jewish Community Campaign
- Jewish Family Service
- Leo Camp Lecture Fund
- JFS Food Bank
- JFS Taxi Transportation Program
- Holocaust Library & Resource Center
- Doris Levin Fund
- Sue B. Viener Memorial Fund for PJ Library
- Harry & Rose Sack Fund for Adult Education
- Evelyn Thompson Fund

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Jewish Family Service is grateful to our committed volunteers!

Here are some ways that you can help:

### Help Fight Hunger

Join us at a JFS Food Pantry to distribute food to our hungry neighbors.

### Share your Professional Expertise

Present a program on travel, photography, or your unique interests or hobbies to our seniors.

### Share your time

A small investment of your personal time can make a profound difference in someone’s life. Visit a shut-in, shop for a homebound senior, or take someone to a doctor’s appointment.

### Donate your vehicle to JFS or donate clothing to CommunityAid

Enjoy tax benefits of donating a car or help our clients through our partnership with CommunityAid.



Contact Us  
Carole Robinson at  
610-921-0624



Jewish Federation  
of Reading/Berks

Community SHABBAT CHANUKAH DINNER

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19

5TH NIGHT OF CHANUKAH

**PROGRAM**  
Guests may join anytime during the program

**4:00 PM - MENORAH & SHABBAT CANDLE LIGHTING**

**4:30 - 5:00 PM - WELCOME SHABBAT SERVICE**

**5:30 PM - DELICIOUS SHABBAT CHANUKAH DINNER**

WWW.CHABADOFBERKS.ORG/RSVP



SAVE THE DATE

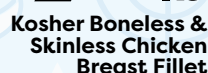
Women's CHANUKAH EVENT

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup>

7:00 PM







We reserve the right to limit quantities. • Not responsible for typographical or pictorial errors.  
Products may not be available in all stores.